



Selah

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Chanukah: Dedication, Hope, Warning and the Messiah!

Chanukah, the Jewish **Festival of Dedication** (Chanukah means 'dedication'), also known as the **Festival of Lights**, is an eight-day festival beginning on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev. This usually falls in the month of December.

The story of Chanukah is found in Maccabees I & II. These books are not a part of the Hebrew Bible (Tanach), but are a part of the Apocrypha and account for Jewish history for the 400 years that follow the book of Malachi.

Solomon's Temple was completely destroyed by the Babylonians, in 586 BC. Later, under the direction of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Temple was rebuilt with the blessing of Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, beginning in 538 BC and taking 23 years. The Temple barely escaped destruction again, in 332 BC, when the Jewish people refused to worship Alexander the Great as God. After his death, Judea and the Temple came under the rule of the Ptolemies. Antiochus III, of the Seleucids, took over, in 198 BC. Then, strong attempts were made to Hellenize the Jewish people and their worship

(cause them to conform to Greek religion and culture).

After his death, Antiochus IV came to the throne with the desire to accomplish his father's goals. Antiochus IV named himself Epiphanes which means "god manifest." But Antiochus' brutality and megalomania were better expressed - sarcastically and privately - by his subjects, who referred to him as Epimanes – the Madman.

In his zeal to eradicate Judaism, he outlawed Jewish customs. Many Jewish people willingly complied. A priest, named Joshua, changed his name to Jason and bribed his way to become the Jewish High Priest. He actively promoted the spiritual decline of the people. Political upheaval then followed, resulting in the massacre of 80,000 Jewish people.

People were then forced to sacrifice to Bacchus and Zeus and were tortured if they refused. They were whipped, scalped, had members and tongues cut off and then were horribly killed. Male babies found circumcised were

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killed, as were those who circumcised them.



The Temple was defiled and robbed. More massacres followed. Orgies were held by the altar. A statue of Zeus

was erected and a pig was sacrificed on the altar. The name Zeus Olympios means ‘Lord of Heaven’ (in Hebrew, ‘Baal ha Shamayim’). In a Hebrew play on words, however, the author of Maccabees ascribes the title ‘Shikutz HaShomem’ – ‘Abomination of Desolation’ – to the statue of Zeus. (Jeremiah 32: 34 & 35 links the Hebrew word ‘baal’ to ‘shikutz’ when speaking of defiling the House of the Lord.) Antiochus decreed that Judaism was no longer legal and that **all** must worship the pagan gods.

Armed troops went from town to town, enforcing Antiochus’ decrees and calling people to public sacrifices. In Modi’in, Judea - east of Jerusalem - a Jewish priest (cohen) named Mattityahu, killed a Jewish man who complied with this profane sacrifice. He, then killed the official who was enforcing it. Mattityahu and his 5 sons fled and led a revolt against the authorities. They were pursued from Jerusalem. During one chase, the troops slaughtered a group of women and children who had stopped fleeing, in order to observe the Sabbath.

The small group of rebels finally liberated Jerusalem three years later. They reclaimed the Temple, cleansed and repaired it for use in true worship. According to tradition, the lamps of the sacred Menorah (lampstand) needed to be lit. There was only enough undefiled oil found to keep the lamps burning for one day. They lit the Menorah and the oil lasted, miraculously, for eight full days – long enough to finish the re-dedication!

Some of the customs practiced, to celebrate this event, include eating foods fried in oil, giving gifts to children, playing games with a spinning top – called

a Dreidle – and, of course, lighting the special Menorah (candelabrum). In the Synagogue, there will be certain prayers of thanksgiving as well as the additional Bible reading from **Haggai 2:10-23**.

The Dreidle is four-sided, with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet written on each side: *nun, gimmel, hey, shin*. One explanation of these four letters is the acrostic: Nes Gadol Hiyah Sham – ‘A Great Sign Happened There’. Others figured out elaborate *gematriot* (numerological explanations based on the fact that every Hebrew letter has a numerical equivalent) and word-plays for the letters on the Dreidle: for example, *nun, gimmel, hey, shin* (נ ג ה ש) in gematria, equals 358, which is also the numerical equivalent of **Mashiach** (מ ש י ח), or **Messiah!**

Jesus confirmed the story of Chanukah, when He foretold of events that will precede His return:

“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand;) Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” (Matthew 24:15-21)

One might think that the prophecy of Daniel, about the ‘abomination of desolation’ (Daniel 11:31) - and other warnings - were fulfilled by Antiochus IV. However, Jesus indicates that this, as well as other Chanukah themes, will happen again, in the run-up to His return.

So, what is Chanukah all about? The oil was not just a miracle, but a sign (Nes). Signs point to something. What does the oil point to? What does light point to?

The late Rabbi Hugo Gryn, whom I had the privilege of meeting some years ago, was a child in Auschwitz. The holiday of Chanukah came and, after fashioning a makeshift menorah, his father melted the precious margarine ration to light a wick for the first night. The young Hugo, outraged, protested to his father. How could he use the food which sustained them in the midst of such horror, just to observe the holiday? In reply, his father spoke words he never forgot. He said: "My child, we know you can live three days without water. You can live three weeks without food. But you cannot live for three minutes without hope." **How could a ceremony, in remembrance of an event that took place millennia before, produce hope?!**

As stated earlier, Haggai 2: 10-23 is read out in the Synagogue service. Verse 9 of that passage reads: *"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."*

Solomon's Temple (the former house or first Temple) contained five glorious elements that were missing in the 'present' house (the 2nd Temple of Haggai's day, rebuilt under Zerubbabel) :

- The fire from Heaven on the Altar
- The Ark of the Covenant
- The Glory of the Divine Presence
- The Urim and The Thummim

In addition to these missing spiritual elements, the physical appearance of Solomon's Temple was more ornate than that of the 2nd Temple. **Why, then, was it prophesied that the glory of the physically and spiritually inferior 2nd Temple would be even greater than the former?** In addition, **how did the LORD God give peace in**

'this place' (the 2nd Temple) if it was completely destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD? Considering a future hope for Israel and a latter glory for the Temple - based on Chanukah - is only possible if Chanukah is midrashic, i.e. that it's prophetic, with more than one fulfillment. Chanukah points to the Messiah! The latter glory of the second house became greater than that of Solomon's Temple at the moment that the glorious Son of God, Yeshua - the "Light of the World" (John 8:12) - came into the Temple:

"Then came the Feast of Dedication (Chanukah) at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The 'Judeans' gathered around him, saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.'" (John 10:22-24)

He had confirmed again and again that He was the Messiah by His signs, wonders and miracles. He declared and revealed Himself to be the Light of the World (John 8:12).

Some things were fulfilled in Jesus' first coming. But let's keep the story of Chanukah in mind as we remind ourselves that He is coming back again. Besides what we've already mentioned above, the parable of the 10 Virgins (Matt. 25: 1-10) is also related against this Chanukah backdrop!

The events of the original Chanukah took place during very, very dark days. Looking around us now, we find ourselves in a similar time. Dear Reader, we can find fresh hope only in Yeshua, the Messiah and true Light of the World, who came once to take away sin for all who believe and put their trust in Him. May those of us, who already believe in Him, keep ourselves undefiled, ready, waiting for His return and with sufficient oil for the days which lie ahead.

Chanukah Sameach! Happy Chanukah!

Christy Rodgers